

Dream Down Payment Act to help thousands of low-income families make the down payment on their first home. Minority homeownership has climbed to record levels of over 50 percent. Housing starts in 2003 were at the highest level in 25 years, and home sales were the highest ever.

As a former real estate attorney, I know firsthand the joy of buyers and sellers. I know the jobs created for the construction workers, landscapers, and suppliers. I appreciate the success of Realtors, and this builds the local tax base for better schools.

While Democrats continue to try to talk down the economy with pessimism, American families living in their own home know that our economy is strong and growing.

In conclusion, may God bless our troops, and we will never forget September 11.

PROVIDE PROTECTION BEFORE DISASTERS OCCUR

(Mr. BLUMENAUER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, last night the House approved disaster assistance for citizens in Florida. Our hearts go out, for it is appropriate for us to step in and do what we can. But we need to do more. There is a big difference in loss from storms, floods and wildfires, depending on what people do in advance to protect themselves.

It is time for the Federal Government to add assistance to do it right, in planning, zoning and building codes, if we create the right balance of policy so fewer people are at risk, we are also kinder to the taxpayers. We know what to do.

I hope we do not have any more supplementals where we do not provide assistance to help people protect themselves to avoid these problems in the first place.

PRESIDENT AN OUTSTANDING LEADER IN WAR ON TERROR

(Mrs. MILLER of Michigan asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. MILLER of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, Senator JOHN KERRY is campaigning to be President by saying that he will use diplomacy to fight a "more sensitive" war on terror. But how does Senator KERRY's diplomatic effort show up on the campaign trail? He refers to the 30-plus nations that have joined our efforts to bring freedom to the people of Iraq as "the coerced and bribed." He constantly belittles the efforts of allies who fight and bleed along with our soldiers in the effort to fight terror and to spread freedom. How can someone who belittles our allies expect to gather more allies?

President Bush has been an outstanding leader in successfully pros-

ecuting the war on terror. He has led the fight to bring freedom to 50 million people in Afghanistan and Iraq. Under his leadership, our forces toppled the Taliban and Saddam Hussein. They have also captured or killed two-thirds of the top leadership of the al Qaeda. Our forces are on the offensive on the war on terror, and because of the outstanding leadership of President George W. Bush, we are spreading freedom, spreading hope and making America a safer place.

THE ECONOMY, UNEMPLOYMENT, AND MEDICARE PREMIUMS

(Ms. SOLIS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. SOLIS. Mr. Speaker, let us clear the air. As President Bush crisscrosses the country touting the state of our economy, it is time for a reality check: 1.7 million jobs have been lost under this President's watch; 1.4 million people lost their health insurance last year; and 4.3 million people, 4.3 million people, have slipped into poverty.

In my district in East Los Angeles and the San Gabriel Valley, 30,000 people are looking for work, 24,000 people are now living in poverty, and one out of every three residents lacks health insurance in my district. Eight million Americans are looking for work.

Now the Bush administration has announced an \$11.60 increase in Medicare premiums. For seniors in my district, that makes a difference. That means they may not be able to afford food and clothing; \$11 is a big deal for people in my district.

Democrats have a plan to cut taxes for middle-class families, protect overtime, and provide incentives for businesses. It is time for us to change the President.

PAYING TRIBUTE TO OUR TROOPS

(Mr. STEARNS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, I rise again to pay tribute and support to our troops, particularly in Afghanistan. We should be reminded that there is a lot of inordinate negative press and that Americans have been apprised of the situation in Iraq, and I think there is a lot of good things happening also in Afghanistan.

Just one of the accomplishments is they are continuing to attack the narcotics trade to prevent proceeds from being used to fund terrorists and insurgents. We are helping the Afghans provide for their own security and rebuilding provinces shattered by more than 20 years of war, tribal fighting, and Taliban oppression. Afghanistan's presidential and parliamentary elections are slated for October 2004 and 2005, respectively.

Those are just a few of the accomplishments of our troops engaged in

Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan. But there is one other thing: one of the accomplishments, obviously, is that their actions overseas and in Iraq have prevented another terrorist attack here in the United States.

So I am proud of our courageous troops defending our Nation, and encourage my colleagues to join me in singing their praises also.

CALLING UPON THE VICE PRESIDENT TO APOLOGIZE

(Mr. STRICKLAND asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. STRICKLAND. Mr. Speaker, if it were permissible under the rules of this House, I would call upon the Vice President to apologize to the American people for making the following outrageous statement. Yesterday he said, "It is absolutely essential that 8 weeks from today on November 2 we make the right choice, because if we make the wrong choice, the danger is we will get hit again."

Does the Vice President not understand that we have parents with sons and daughters fighting in Iraq who are members of the Democratic Party and who support Senator KERRY for President? Does he not understand that at this very moment and at the moment he spoke, there were Democratic soldiers in Iraq fighting for his freedom, as well as the freedom of all of us?

It is shameful, shameful, that the Vice President would interject such a divisive bit of rhetoric into the public discourse in this country. Has he no shame?

HONORING CARLY PATTERSON

(Mr. SAM JOHNSON of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SAM JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, last month, Carly Patterson captured the gold medal and the hearts of the world when she won the all-around competition in gymnastics. Her come-from-behind victory will always have a place in the all-time best moments in the Athens Olympics. It is a tremendous honor to recognize America's sweetheart for her hard work. Carly also won a silver medal in the team competition and an individual silver in the balance beam.

Just this past weekend, Allen, Texas, gave her a hero's welcome-back parade. Thousands lined the street to congratulate her on a job well done.

Carly Patterson is a shining example for America to countless young people about all that you can accomplish when you put your mind to it. Carly made Allen and America proud with her good sportsmanship and her heart of a champion.

Great job, Carly Patterson. We are proud of you. God bless you. We all salute you.